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ABSTRACT

One of the many ways to assess teaching quality in higher education is student evaluation of the instructor's competence, used in many universities. This approach has both strengths and weaknesses. Its drawbacks include the pressure students may feel to give higher ratings to an instructor or that the assessment usually comes too late in a course for the instructor to improve instruction and might not be pertinent for the students in the next course. Additional means of teacher evaluation include: (1) videotaped classroom lessons reviewed by evaluators; (2) teacher portfolios, which may include a video; and (3) comparison of behaviorally-stated course objectives defined by the teacher with student achievement test results. The evaluation of teachers may include evaluation of teacher performance in in-service professional education activities or evaluation of teacher effectiveness after in-service education. Any procedure used to evaluate teachers should be valid in its focus on the effectiveness of the instructor's teaching. Reliability is another key factor, and improvement over previous levels of performance in instruction should be documented. (SLD)

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Assessing Teaching Quality in Higher Education

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ASSESSING TEACHING QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

There are numerous ways to assess teaching quality in higher education. Quality instruction in each course is a must! Students individually need to achieve optimally. The following are procedures which may be used to receive feedback from students on how well the instructor is doing in classroom instruction with pros and cons discussed for each approach.

Student evaluation of the instructor's competency is used in many universities. A standardized form may be used or a local cooperatively developed form may be used. Here, students may rate the instructor on a five point scale on items such as the instructor is well prepared for teaching each class session; the instructor starts and ends class sessions on time; evaluation procedures used truly measure what has been learned; and what is taught is relevant, among other items.

Student evaluation of the instructor's competence, skills, and attitudes has its pros and cons. Strong points in having student's assess the instructor's teaching include:

1. it is one approach in assessing the work of the instructor.
2. it provides information to the instructor on what needs to be improved upon in classroom instruction.
3. it gives students an opportunity for input into the curriculum.

Disadvantages include the following:

1. students are not held accountable for responses given on the rating scale.
2. students may have responded in haste and not have read each item carefully on the rating scale.
3. students may rate non-instructional factors, such as instructor's humor and ease of class, rather than the quality of teaching (See Ediger, 1994, 169-174).

Results from student's evaluation of an instructor's classroom instruction may be used to grant/refuse tenure, promotion/non-promotion, and/or retention/dismissal. To be increasingly valid and reliable, the kinks need to be taken out of these evaluation forms. Student evaluations are necessary of the instructor's classroom instruction, but there are too many loopholes to use this device solely to assess teaching and learning.

There are instructors who do not favor the items for instructional capabilities listed on a standardized form responded to by students in class. In selected cases, these instructors have been permitted to develop their very own appraisal forms with the results from the student sent to the appropriate administrator. There are problems in having instructors administer the assessment forms in their very own classes.

Thus, students may feel pressure to assess the instructor with higher ratings than if an independent supervisor of assessment was giving the appraisal device to students. Second, the assessment is usually done toward the close of the semester when an instructor cannot use the results to improve instruction for the course presently being taught. Third, the assessment results, given at the end of the semester, are not valid for the next course since a different set of students will be in the offing (Ediger, 2000, 503-505).

Additional Means of Instructor Assessment

Videotaping of classroom instruction for each instructor may be another avenue to use in assessing the instructor's teaching quality. Here, the instructor is videotaped in actual lessons taught. Quality criteria need to be drawn up ahead of time, prior to video-taping, to use in the assessment process. The following criteria developed cooperatively by professionals may be used:

1. knowledge of subject matter taught.
2. developing student interest in the subject matter.
3. maintaining learner interest in ongoing experiences.
4. helping students perceive purpose in learning.
5. answering student's questions politely and in a caring manner.
6. emphasizing critical and creative thinking, as well as problem solving in each lesson taught.
7. using fair, valid, and reliable methods of evaluation of student achievement.
8. stressing appropriate sequence in each learning opportunity.
9. having students engage in depth learning rather than survey procedures.
10. encouraging questions of students pertaining to what is not understood (See Ediger, 2000, 38-44).

Video-taped presentations may be assessed by quality evaluators using the above named criteria. Feedback is then provided to the instructor to improve the quality of instruction. Future video-taped presentations may be evaluated based upon improvements made from the earlier assessment. Improved instruction should be an end result.

If possible, professional evaluators may actually observe instructor teaching and have a followup conference to appraise teaching quality. Evaluators should always notice if improvement in teaching performance is in evidence from an earlier observation and conference.

In addition to student evaluation of the instructor's teaching and videotaping actual instructor teaching, a portfolio (See LaBoskey, 2000) may be developed to show achievement in the instructional arena. The portfolio should reveal a representative sampling of instructional

quality. In teacher education classes, the instructor may include the following, as an example, in a portfolio:

1. snapshots of student projects to be used as teaching aids.
2. journal entries of daily experiences when interacting with students.
3. a videotape pertaining to the instructor leading students in a discussion.
4. cassettes pertaining to critical and creative thinking as well as problem solving experiences involving students within class sessions.
5. student ratings of the instructor.
6. diary entries of conferences conducted with students.
7. written student assessment of a class taken with the instructor.
8. plans made for teaching next semester's classes aimed to improve student performance.
9. an outline of subject matter taught.
10. a listing of speaking engagements in the community and awards received for outstanding service.

The completed portfolio, including a self evaluation, may be shared with university administrators for accountability purposes and/or for receiving tenure or promotion. If a new position in a different university is being applied for, the portfolio may be shared with the personnel director. Portfolio contents are excellent devices to reveal personal achievements and accomplishments. They may be updated as needed. Items may be deleted as the need arises.

Portfolios should not be too voluminous. If they are, the chances are that the reader may skip over much of the contents. Nor, should portfolios be too limited in content. Wholeness of content may not be in evidence if the information in a portfolio is too limited. Salient content, only, should be inherent in the portfolio. Items therein should pinpoint objectives of the course taught. Critical thinking is necessary to select what to include and what to omit in portfolio development. Creative thinking is needed in pursuing the portfolio project since each entry must reflect the instructor's purposes and design. No two portfolios will be alike. Thus, creativity is needed by the instructor in completing a unique portfolio, suitable for accountability purposes, as well as to assess instructor achievement. Electronic multimedia portfolios are becoming increasingly popular to develop (See Ediger, 2000, Chapter Eight).

As another means of instructor assessment in the instructional arena, there are selected universities which require instructors to list carefully chosen behaviorally stated objectives for each course to be taught. The objectives are then turned in to the Dean of Instruction's office. Instructors then choose learning opportunities so that students may achieve these behaviorally stated objectives. Criterion referenced tests directly related to the stated objectives for each course are also

turned in to the Dean of Instruction's office. Students are then tested at appropriate intervals to determine how successful the instructor was in teaching. A printout of the test is sent to the Dean's Office to notice the success of instruction as indicted by student test results. Instructor competence is to be documented, not assumed, when the philosophy of criterion referenced testing is used.

Inservice Educational Opportunities

There are numerous inservice educational opportunities that instructors need to avail themselves of. It might be difficult to ascertain how well these inservice educational opportunities translate themselves into improved classroom instruction. However, evidence is there that the instructor did attend diverse inservice educational opportunities.

1. courses taken on university campuses deemed to assist the instructor to perform more optimally in the classroom. Course work here may lead to a doctorate or emphasize advanced graduate study. Coursework taken on a university campus needs to stress the following criteria:

a) it should be in the area of academic specialty of the involved instructor so that improved classroom instruction will be an end result.

b) it should be challenging to the instructor taking the course(s).

c) it should be taken on a campus whose coursework is approved by appropriate accrediting agencies, such as the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

d) it should emphasize personal, social, and intellectual growth of the instructor. Improved human relationships should be in the offing later when working with students in and outside the classroom.

e) it should motivate the instructor to achieve higher goals in life.

2. professional meetings attended in the instructor's area of expertise. Local, state and national organizations provide conventions to further inservice education of instructors. Thus, for example, the National Council for the Social Studies, the National Council Teachers of Mathematics, the National Council Teachers of English, and the International Reading Association, among others, can provide excellent opportunities for instructors to learn and implement quality teaching strategies in the classroom. It is hoped that the local university will provide adequate funds to reimburse instructors for attending these inservice education opportunities. Instructors should avail themselves of the many opportunities of inservice education in order to improve teaching and learning in the classroom. Sessions at professional meetings attended should assist the instructor to improve teaching skills so that students might attain more optimally.

3. engage in doing research (See Schroth, et. al., 1999).

Research performed should relate directly to the academic areas taught by the instructor. Permission needs to be obtained from the public schools if the research deals with determining how well pubic school pupils do when using an innovative procedure in teaching. Research design needs to be quality in nature so that the independent variable truly measures the effectiveness of the innovative procedure in an experimental study. The following are examples of research studies that may be made by a university instructor:

a) continuous progress versus traditional approaches in reading instruction.

b) using the Big Book in beginning reading instructional as compared to the use of basal readers.

c) psychological versus logical sequencing of pupil learning.

d) effectiveness of a caring curriculum.

e) heterogeneous versus homogeneous grouping of pupils in the classroom.

Proper sampling of pupils for the study must be in evidence as well as appropriate means of measuring pretest and post-test results. Measurement instruments used must emphasize high validity and reliability. Research strategies need to be mastered by the university instructor. Results from the research may well be used to enhance instruction in the classroom (See Salvia and Ysseldyke, 1995).

The quality of research design may be assessed as a means of stressing instructor proficiency in his/her area of academic specialty. A major objective of instructor growth in teaching is for learning to become a lifelong pursuit, not a momentary goal.

4. developing a plan of inservice growth. These yearly plans should be made as soon as in instructor enters the arena of university instruction. Each plan stresses what the university instructor will do to grow, develop, and achieve. Becoming bored, stale, and static are not concepts that should be in the repertoire of the university instructor. Rather enthusiasm, zest for life and living, enjoying the academic world, and love for teaching and learning should be at the heart of what is advocated and lived by the university instructor. A yearly plan developed, written and approved, might well include the following:

a) do a survey of recent literature pertaining to inservice education of teachers.

b) complete an indepth study of how to motivate students to learn.

c) write a journal article for publication on a or b above or on another relevant topic.

d) give a talk at a state or national teacher education convention on your survey or study conducted on the above named topics.

e) present your findings to the faculty of your school of education.

Doing surveys and making studies should promote the interests and purposes of the instructor to increase proficiency in the classroom.

In Closing

There are numerous procedures available to assess instructor competence on the higher education level. Each procedure should be valid in that it attempts to ascertain the effectiveness of the instructor's teaching. The major goal of assessment is to determine the quality of instruction provided to students. Instructors may learn from each approach used in the assessment process. What is learned should assist in improving instruction. Thus, validity is a key concept in evaluating the quality of instruction.

Reliability is another key factor. The means used to assess instructor competency should measure consistently. If inconsistent measures occur, then it is doubtful as to the quality of instruction that is occurring.

Improvement over previous levels of performance in instruction needs to be documented. Each approach used in assessing instructor competence should guide the instructional process to

1. engage students in active involvement in learning.
2. help students understand and attach meaning to what is being learned.
3. provide for multiple intelligences possessed by students (See Gardner, 1993).
4. assist students to achieve welt intellectually, socially, morally, and ethically.
5. develop student competence in analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating acquired information in teaching and learning situations.
6. foster within students a lifelong desire for improvement in professional teaching and learning.
7. improve the lot of each student in belonging to diverse groups, having recognition needs met, and being secure in whatever environment he/she is in.
8. encourage professionalism among students so that the future teacher is concerned about positive pupil achievement in the public schools.
9. emphasize the development of the whole student as a teacher and as a member of society.
10. empathize with pupils being taught in the public schools in that all human beings have feelings and are worthy of optimal development.

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